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Outside

Sports ♦ Activities ♦ Events

Trips to 4 nearby amusement parks

By Mike Morris
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

It's that time of the year again.

With Memorial Day weekend behind us, several major amusement parks have expanded their hours and are offering new rides to entice the thrill-seeker in us all. Below is a listing of regional theme parks and what they have to offer.

Heart-stopping thrills are a daytrip away

Expect to pay about a $40 entrance fee, although most parks offer discounted admission if you come later in the day.

■ **Six Flags America (Largo; www.sixflags.com/parks/america; 301-249-1500):** This modern amusement park has more than 100 rides, shows and attractions. Only 40 miles from Baltimore, Six Flags America is the closest theme park to the city. There are eight coasters and five live shows, including a new Western stunt show and country music performances.

Don't miss the Superman Ride of Steel, a 3 minute, 20 second ride where participants get the unique experience of flying like the superhero. Get a million dollar view while flying 75 mph.

Prefer Batman? Then check out The Penguin's Blizzard River, a new Batman-themed spinning-rapids ride — the only one of its kind on the East Coast. On this ride, a dozen six-person rafts are taken 60 feet high and then sent down a 469-foot flume while spinning.

One-day regular admission is $35.99. Parking is $9 per vehicle. The 25-acre "Paradise Island" water park is free with park admission. The park is open 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. for a bulk of the summer.

■ **Hershey Park (Hershey, Pa.; www.hersheypa.com; 800-HERSHEY):** What's not to love about a place that combines roller coasters and candy? As the self-proclaimed "sweetest place on Earth," Hershey Park offers visitors a tour of its chocolate factory in addition to its nine coasters and 52 rides and attractions.

New this year is the Claw, a 65-foot spinning pendulum ride — the first of its kind in the Northeast. If you're into more traditional rides, check out the Comet, the park's second coaster since its 1946 opening, or the Sooper Dooper Looper, added in 1977.

Looking to get wet? Ride the Coal Cracker Log Flume, or get drenched on Tidal Force.

One-day regular admission is $35.95. A visit to ZOOAMERICA is included in admission. The park is open 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. most days.

■ **Paramount's Kings Dominion (Doswell, Va.; www.kingsdominion.com; 804-876-5000):** From the fast-paced Grizzly to the classic Rebel Yell, this park offers some of the region's finest wooden roller coasters.

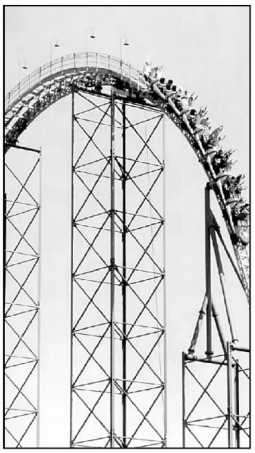
They've got steel coasters covered, too. Volcano: The Blast Coaster is one of the world's fastest suspended coasters. It shoots visitors 155 feet out of the top of its volcanic crater.

Other notable highlights include the Drop Zone Stunt Tower, which drops participants more than 300 feet, and the Shockwave, the East Coast's first stand-up roller coaster.

After these heart-stopping rides, cool of at WaterWorks, Kings Dominion's massive 650,000-gallon wave pool. Or relax while drifting down a river with waterfalls on the "Lazy Rider."

One-day regular admission is $41.99 ($4 less when purchased online). Parking is $7 per vehicle. The park is open 10:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. most days. Approximately a two-hour drive from Baltimore.

■ **Busch Gardens Williamsburg (Williamsburg, Va.; www.buschgardens.com; 800-343-7946):** Three miles east of historic Williamsburg, Busch Gardens is less ride-oriented, with a greater emphasis placed on a cultural atmosphere and European-themed shows.



Paradise Lagoon and the Superman Ride of Steel are at Six Flags America in Largo.

But this park still has some stellar thrill rides. Experience one of the world's tallest and most twisted inverted roller coasters — Alpengeist. The ride reaches 195 feet and 67 mph.

The Big Bad Wolf is a suspended roller coaster that flies through a re-created Bavarian village at speeds approaching 50 mph. The Wolf drops a sheer 99 feet to nearly skim the Rhine River below.

The popular Loch Ness Monster celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. Reaching 13 stories high with a 114-foot drop, this ride offers a breathtaking ride at speeds up to 60 miles per hour.

When leaving the Loch Ness in Heatherdowns Scotland, head over to Festa Italia and get soaked on the white-water rafting ride, "Roman Rapids."

One-day regular admission is $44.99. Open 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. for a majority of the summer.

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